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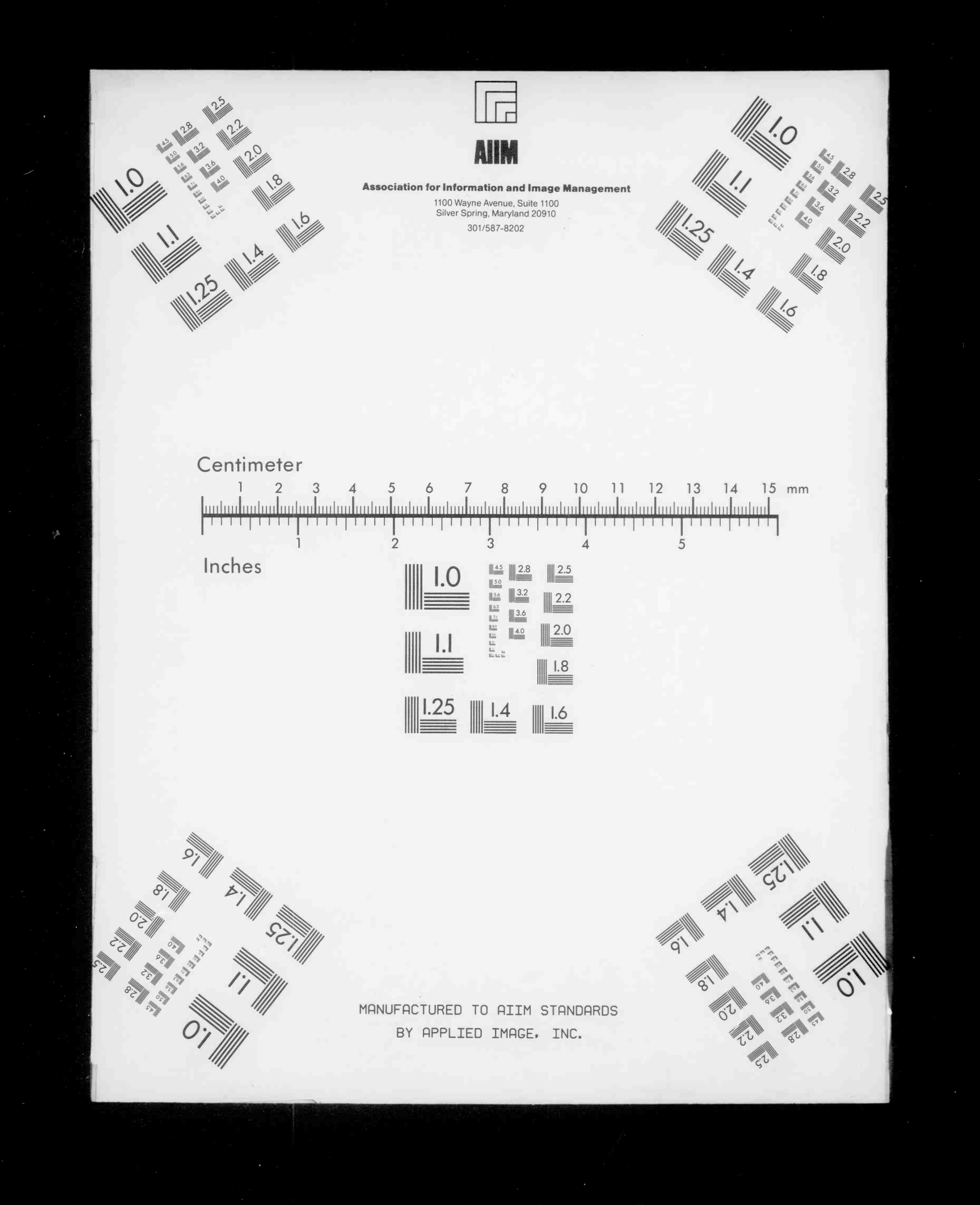
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UNDERLYING JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

By

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The Hope of a World to Come

Underlying Judaism and Christianity

BY

EDWYN BEVAN, M.A.

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THE HOPE OF A WORLD TO COME

FOR the text of my lecture I should like to take a passage of the article on "Ages of the World" in Hastings's *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*. The section of the article which deals with Persian, Zoroastrian, ideas of the world-process is contributed by a distinguished Swedish writer on comparative religion, Archbishop Söderblom. He writes: "The Mazdayasnian scheme [i.e. the Zoroastrian scheme] expresses in a somewhat scholastic way the idea implied in the word *history*: that is to say, 'something happens in what happens' (E. J. Geijer), so that the intricate mass of events has a meaning and a goal beyond the actual combinations and situation. The real kernel of history is a 'forward', not a 'see-saw' and not a 'backward', although it may seem so to human eyes. This profound conception has arisen only twice in the history of human thought —in the only two ancient prophetic religions, one Aryan, one Semitic—in Zarathustrianism and in Mosaism. Neither seems to have

borrowed it from the other. Christianity inherited it from Mosaism, and it has become prevalent in the Western civilization in the form of belief in a Divine purport in history, in progressive evolution, or in a redeeming crisis, and constitutes one of the most significant features and influential factors in the civilization of Europe and America, as distinguished from the great civilizations of India and of the Far East."

So far Archbishop Söderblom. With regard to the ancient Hebrews it would be universally admitted that by the time of Alexander the Great the Jews both believed the world-process to have begun in a unique act of creation by God and to be moving towards a great consummation, a kingdom of God, in which good would triumph over evil, the conditions of earth would undergo a miraculous transformation, and the holy people, now entirely righteous, enjoy final rest and glory. In the Hebrew prophetic books, as we have them, this is plainly declared. When, however, we ask how far Israel had this hope already before the Exile we enter on a field of controversy. The date of our documents becomes a question, the date of this and

that element in our documents. As is well known, critical scholars in the nineteenth century believed that they had shown books attributed by our scriptural tradition to one or other great name in Israel's past to be really composite productions, whose elements belonged to widely different dates. The Law and the Prophets alike were in this way cut up by the critical saw and the pieces variously assigned. Thus the school of Wellhausen maintained that in the earliest of the prophetical books, those of Amos and Hosea and Micah, there had originally been no indication of a time of restoration and joy to come. These prophets had been simply announcers of judgment: Micah had declared that Zion would be ploughed as a field and Jerusalem become heaps of stones, and had left it at that, with no ray of hope on beyond. Afterwards, it was held, when the judgment had fallen, when Israel had been carried into captivity or subjected to Gentile rule, Jewish visionaries began to conceive a restoration some day to come, and in copying the old books with their unrelieved gloom they inserted or added passages which pointed to a bright and glorious future. For instance, we read

to-day at the end of the book of Amos: "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen and close up the breaches thereof, and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old. . . . And I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel, and they shall build the waste cities and inhabit them, and they shall plant vineyards and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land and they shall no more be plucked up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God." Nothing of all that, the school of Wellhausen said, entered the mind of the herdman of Tekoa in the eighth century; it had all been added as a consolation in the dark days after the Exile.

But whether or not the prophets of Israel had at the outset spoken only of judgment and said nothing of restoration and world-renewal, the important thing is that by the time the Old Testament books received the form in which we have them to-day—and that, on any critical theory, is, in the case of nearly all of them, several centuries before the Christian era—the conception of

the world-process as destined to lead up to a kingdom of God was firmly established amongst the Jews.

When we turn to the documents of the Zoroastrian religion we find there, too, a view of the world-process which makes it begin in a creation by God and lead to a triumph of good over evil. The dualism which was so strongly marked in Zoroastrianism, even as early as the days of the Achaemenian kings, does not appear so plainly in what is believed to be the oldest part of the Avesta, the *Gâthas*, which modern scholars commonly hold to go back to the founder Zarathushtra himself. Zarathushtra, as they construe his personality and teaching, is more like an Old Testament prophet than any other figure outside the Hebrew sphere. His view is practically monotheistic. He did not, it is held, himself mark out a series of world-ages with a resurrection at its close, as Zoroastrianism did later on. On the contrary, he expected the kingdom of God immediately to appear. He called men to rally under his leadership to God's cause in the last great fight, now at hand, against the partisans of the Lie, and he expected himself to live to the day of God's triumph,

when the wicked would be turned into a hell of cold and darkness and stench, and those who had merited heaven by their good works would pass successfully through the stream of molten metal, cross the Bridge of Division, and be rewarded by God with a life of endless bliss in heaven. Heaven was an idealization of earth such as would be conceived by a people of primitive farmers. Zarathushtra himself looked forward to receiving from God, as his special portion in the life to come, "ten mares, together with a stallion and a camel".

When the religion of Zarathushtra took shape in later generations, its doctrine of the time-process was elaborated. It was now held to consist of a sequence of ages, the duration of each of which was stated in a certain number of thousands of years; the final consummation was put at a more distant future, and was preceded by a general resurrection of the righteous and the wicked, whereas the Bridge of Decision now did not belong to the consummation at the end of human history, but determined the destiny of each individual at the moment after his death. Further, the representative of God who would bring the process to a

close and usher in the Divine Kingdom, was now not Zarathushtra himself, but a kind of Messiah who had the title of Saoshyant (Saviour) and was to be born miraculously of the seed of Zarathushtra and a virgin. In this more elaborate form of the religion we get obviously a closer parallel to the idea of the world-process found in the Jewish apocalyptic books from Daniel and Enoch onwards.

That which Judaism and Zoroastrianism have in common is, as Söderblom emphasized in the passage with which I began, very remarkable. "Neither religion", he said, "seems to have borrowed it from the other." That is certainly a possible view. If we believe, as Jews and Christians believe, that the men who delivered to the ancient Hebrew people the books composing the Old Testament were specially guided in their thoughts by God, we are not thereby compelled to deny the possibility that those who came as prophets to other peoples might in their measure be guided by the same Spirit, and, if so, their teaching might show remarkable analogies to that of the Old Testament and of the other Jewish literature of Greek and Roman times. But

the view that neither religion borrowed from the other is not that of all scholars. If we embark on the inquiry, which borrowed from which, the question of relative dates becomes the first consideration, and that, we find at once, is involved in seemingly hopeless controversy. We saw just now that in the case of the pre-exilic prophets those passages which speak of a golden age coming are assigned by some modern scholars to a much more recent time, when the hypothesis of Persian influence would not be excluded by chronology. On the other hand, when we turn to Zoroastrianism, everything in the matter of dates seems still to be highly speculative and uncertain. The date of Zarathushtra himself, as one authority construes the probabilities, differs by many centuries from the date which seems probable to another authority. Jackson inclines to the traditional date, 660–583 B.C.E.; Hertel (in 1924) supposed him to have been still alive in 522 B.C.E.; Geldner put him as early as the fourteenth century B.C.E.; Carl Clemen, Eduard Meyer, and Moulton, doubtfully, somewhere near 1000 B.C.E.; Bartholomae says about 900 B.C.E. One firm fact in this uncertainty

is that Theopompus (born 376 B.C.E.) gave an account of the Persian religion according to which it represented the world-process as a conflict between the Good Power and the Evil Power, with successive periods of three thousand years, ending in a triumph of the Good Power and a state of bliss. We have the account of Theopompus only in a *résumé* given by Plutarch about A.D. 100, and both text and interpretation of this passage of Plutarch are doubtful. It is not easy to make Plutarch's description agree with the system of world-ages as we have it stated in later Zoroastrian books, and there is a possibility of Plutarch having misunderstood Theopompus, as well as a possibility of Theopompus having misunderstood contemporary Zoroastrian doctrine. But this much is clear: in the fourth century B.C.E. the Persian religion already saw the world-process as a sequence of ages distinctly marked out in three-thousand-year periods. It is not possible, I think, to show the existence of a similar idea amongst the Jews till we come to the book of Enoch, whose earliest parts probably belong to the second century B.C.E. It seems to me, therefore, not unreasonable to believe that Jewish

apocalyptic did owe something to Persian influence.

But before we go farther, we must note that the view of Archbishop Söderblom, which makes the Jews and the Persians the only two people who believed the world-process to be leading to a state of Divine bliss, has not gone unchallenged in recent times. Amongst critical scholars there was a movement at the end of the last century, connected with the names of Gunkel and Gressmann, which sought the origin of ideas prevalent amongst the ancient Hebrews in Babylonia or Egypt. This school believed that it could point to the expectation of a golden age amongst Babylonians and Egyptians. They argued further that, if such an idea was current in the countries on either side of Palestine, it was natural to suppose that it would have infiltrated into the body of conceptions in the minds of Hebrew prophets; passages, therefore, in the pre-exilic prophets which spoke of a golden age coming were almost certainly part of their original message. It would be strange, they held, if we did not find something of the sort. This view of the Gunkel-Gressmann school seemed like a return to the tradi-

tional view which had been repudiated by Wellhausen. In one way it was a return, but, of course, it was a return with a very great difference. The traditional view had believed these predictions to have been communicated to the Hebrew prophets as an original inspiration of the Spirit of God; according to the Gressmann-Gunkel school they appeared as folk-lore borrowed from neighbouring nations.

A recent interesting book by Freiherr von Gall (Heidelberg, 1926), which has the Greek title *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* ("Kingdom of God"), has subjected the views of the Gunkel-Gressmann school to close criticism. Von Gall believes, like Archbishop Söderblom, that the expectation of a coming kingdom of God is found only amongst the Hebrews and the Persians. He disagrees, on the other hand, with Söderblom on the question whether the expectation arose independently in the two peoples; he maintains that it arose originally amongst the Persians only, and that, as found in the Old Testament, it is due entirely to Persian influence upon the Jews. Thus he returns to the Wellhausen position, that the predictions of a miraculous restoration found in the

earlier prophets are later insertions; but he is even more drastic than Wellhausen: he will not admit any expectation amongst the Hebrews of a world-renewal before Deutero-Isaiah, the days when the Persian Cyrus opened the way for the Jewish exiles to return. Wellhausen had regarded Ezekiel as the first predicter of a restoration.

It seems to me improbable that such a radical theory will be accepted by scholars. It implies, for instance, that even a book like Ezekiel, which bears such strong marks of being the work of a single author, has to be cut up, and the predictions of restoration assigned to a later time. And even Von Gall admits that the first chapter of Isaiah is authentic Isaiah. That chapter does not, indeed, speak of any miraculous golden age, but it does predict a time coming when the nation will be reformed and the ideal of righteousness become actual; and if you admit no more than the existence of such an expectation in the original Isaiah, you have admitted in Israel the germ of a belief analogous to the Zoroastrian belief at a time when the hypothesis of Persian influence upon Israel could hardly be entertained. In his denial, then, that the hope of a

coming kingdom of God was original amongst the Hebrews, apart from Persian influence, Von Gall does not appear to me at all convincing; but his book does seem to me valuable and sound where it criticizes the Babylonian and Egyptian theories of the Gunkel-Gressmann school. Von Gall takes one after another the bits in the Babylonian-Assyrian and the Egyptian documents now at our disposal, which have been adduced to prove expectations of a coming miraculous Messianic age amongst Babylonians, Assyrians, and Egyptians, and he shows that on closer inspection they do nothing of the kind. This is not the place to go through his examination of the documents in detail, but we may as a specimen look at two Egyptian documents which have seemed to some scholars to show an anticipation of the Hebrew-Persian belief in a coming kingdom of God.

One of these documents belongs to a date between 2000 and 1800 B.C.E., and contains descriptions of a time of tribulation attributed to an ancient sage called Ipuwer. Only fragments of the document are preserved, but the concluding fragment paints the picture of a time of happiness in Egypt,

as it was conceived by the writer and the men of his day. "How goodly it is, when the ships go up the river! How goodly it is when men stretch the net and birds are found! How goodly it is when men's hands build pyramids and dig ponds and make plantations of trees for the gods! How goodly it is when people are drunk! They drink strong drink and their heart is joyful!" It requires, I think, some anthropological hardihood to find here a parallel to the Hebrew hope of a kingdom of God.

The other Egyptian document purports to contain the discourse of a lamb which, like Balaam's ass, had the gift of speech. The papyrus itself is not earlier than the Christian era, but the king, Bocchōris, to whom the lamb is said to have delivered its prophecy, belonged to the end of the eighth century B.C.E. The performance of the lamb must have had considerable prestige in the early centuries of the Christian era, because it is referred to, as a noted portent, both by Julius Africanus and by Aelian in his book, *On the Nature of Animals*. The demotic papyrus is too fragmentary for us to make out now much of what the lamb said to the king. It evidently described a time of tribu-

lation—"lies, violation of right and law, the shrines of the Egyptian gods carried captive into Asia"—and it did apparently indicate some better time coming, when the men of Egypt would recover the shrines of the gods. The lamb also mentioned a period of 900 years—or, in the version of Julius Africanus, 990 years—but in what connection the state of the papyrus does not allow us to know. That is all. The lamb cannot be regarded as much of a witness to the expectation of a Messianic age amongst the Egyptians.

No, it seems as if in the present state of our knowledge we must hold to the dictum of Archbishop Söderblom with which we began—that amongst the Hebrews and the Persians alone of ancient peoples there came into currency a conception of the world-process which saw it as an age-long conflict between good and evil, together with a firm faith that in the end God would triumph over the evil power, that evil would be abolished, and the righteous live as a blessed and joyful community in a world miraculously transformed. And I think the documents indicate that long before the Jews came under Persian rule their prophets

already had a kindred conception. It may well be, as I said just now, that the mapping out of the process into a series of world-ages, numerically determined, which we find in Jewish apocalyptic from the second century B.C.E. onwards, was due to suggestion from Zoroastrianism; but, if so, the Jews must have been susceptible to the suggestion, because the view of the world-process which they already had lent itself to such an elaboration. History was already for Amos and Isaiah a process guided by the God of Israel in order to realize some Divine purpose of righteousness. At the outset the consummation to which they looked forward may have been conceived simply as an ideally righteous and happy kingdom in Palestine, the essential religious faith being still clothed in childlike imagery; but that was after all not so naïve as Zoroaster's anticipation that in the world to come he would be the happy possessor of ten mares, a stallion, and a camel. As time went on and the thought of religious Jews became more mature, it was largely realized that no kingdom of God limited by the essential conditions of earthly life could satisfy the spirit of man.

So far as the Greco-Roman world went,

the belief that the world-process was directed by a Divine purpose to a great consummation was put before it by the Jews and Christians only; for the Christian Church carried that on as part of its Hebraic heritage. The Persian sphere was outside that of the Roman Empire, and under the Parthian kings, who ruled till the Sassanian restoration about A.D. 225, the Zoroastrian religion seems to have been in a very debased condition. Also whilst Jews and Christians both carried on propaganda, and many people in that dissatisfied world were drawn to Synagogue or Church, the Zoroastrian religion had long ceased to be a missionary religion.

After nineteen centuries of Christianity we people of the West are accustomed to think of the time-process as leading somewhere; even those who do not accept the Christian faith nevertheless believing in some kind of progress, or possibility of progress, as characteristic of the history of mankind, and therefore feeling that it is worth while to do something to improve the world, because all improvement means another stage towards some condition of things, some goal perhaps quite vaguely

imagined, on beyond. It is hard for us to-day to realize how things seemed to the people of the ancient world who had no expectation at all of that kind, what a difference it must have made to all feeling about life. The ordinary man perhaps nowhere looks far beyond the interests and anxieties of his everyday life, and yet in some degree the thoughts and feelings of the ordinary man were then, and are now, shaped and coloured by the ideas put into circulation by the thinkers and teachers of the schools. And when we ask what idea of the world-process was held by the thinkers and teachers of Greco-Roman society, we find that they all thought of it as, in one way or another, a vain eternal recurrence, leading nowhere. Plato and Aristotle believed that the material earth had existed from all eternity, and would go on existing to all eternity, but that every human civilization would sooner or later perish by some great natural catastrophe—flood or earthquake: after that the few survivors would hand on in out-of-the-way places fragments of the arts and the sciences of the civilization gone, till later generations gradually built up a new civilization, to perish in its turn.

The Epicureans taught that worlds were always being constituted by chance collisions of atoms rushing through infinite space; many other worlds existed now besides our own, but sooner or later each world was broken up again, and the same sort of thing would go on for ever. The doctrine of eternal recurrence was formulated most precisely by the Stoics, the most widely popular of all the schools. As against the Platonists and Aristotelians, the Stoics maintained that the present world was not eternal. The whole universe had been constituted by a condensation of part of the Divine Fire which was Reason and God. After a destined period it would all be absorbed again into the Divine Fire; every individual existence, animals and men and gods, would disappear, and the Fire, God, remain alone for a period in solitary Oneness and Bliss. Then at the destined moment another world precisely like ours would be formed out of the Fire and run its course, precisely like the course of ours, and be reabsorbed. And so on for ever and ever.

Someone may point to the famous Fourth Eclogue of Virgil as showing the hope of a Messianic age existing amongst cultured

Romans in the middle of the last century before the Christian era. There are certainly, as has often been pointed out, striking similarities between the description given in that Latin poem of the golden age coming and some of the descriptions of the coming age of bliss in the Old Testament prophets. It may well be that the source of Virgil's imagery was actually the Old Testament. Certainly it is exceedingly unlikely that he drew from it directly. If a roll of the Septuagint ever came into his hands, it is unlikely that he would have made out much of that foreign and uncouth Greek. But Jewish propaganda had put into circulation a great quantity of fabricated Sibylline oracles in which much of the Old Testament imagery was translated into Greek hexameters imitating the style and vocabulary of Homer. There is nothing unlikely in Virgil having come across some of that Jewish Sibylline literature and having got suggestion from it. He actually in the poem calls the golden age coming the age of Sibylline song. But even if Virgil was here influenced by Jewish literature, his poem does not really express a hope like the Hebrew one. It seems rather to point to a

golden age coming as simply part of an eternal recurrence. He indicates that the heroic age now at hand would be a repetition of the heroic age of the past—another ship Argo, another Achilles. And so one is probably to suppose that the new golden age would again be succeeded by inferior ages according to the fixed scheme of the cycle. That would just correspond with the traditional idea in India. There, too, you get an eternal recurrence of the cycle of four ages, the golden age being the first, with progressive deterioration every time to the fourth, evil age, in which man is now living. One may look forward to another golden age recurring each time the cycle begins again, but there is no final consummation as in the Hebrew and Zoroastrian hope.

> Oh cease! must hate and death return?
> Cease! must men kill and die?
> Cease! drain not to its dregs the urn
> Of bitter prophecy!
> The world is weary of the past;
> Oh might it die or rest at last!

It is hard, as I have just said, to realize how different life must have felt when the time-process was not, for you, moving to

any goal. The philosophy which prescribed a diversion of interest from everything which happened in time, an absorption in some static timeless being or system of ideas, was the only reasonable one in the ancient Greek world and in India. If we are ever disposed to criticize such an attitude adversely, we must remember that it followed altogether logically from the view taken of the time-process. How could any wise man feel passion to do something in the moving world, to help the process another stage forward, if he knew for certain that nothing he did could make any permanent difference, that the same old round would inevitably go on for ever? It is perhaps in Marcus Aurelius that you get most poignantly expressed the sense of enormous tedium which resulted from looking at a world where history was an endless, monotonous repetition. All that a man could rise to in such a world was to do the duty of the day conscientiously and wearily, to realize a certain ideal of nobility as an individual during the little moment of his existence between two waste eternities. But there is one other poignant expression of the feeling in another ancient book, which has some

points of resemblance and some points of contrast to the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius, and that is a book written, probably about three or four centuries before Marcus Aurelius, by a Jew. I mean, of course, the book of Koheleth. That book begins by describing the natural reaction to the idea of eternal recurrence.

"Vanity of vanities (saith Koheleth), vanity of vanities, all is vanity. What profit hath man of all his labour wherein he laboureth under the sun? One generation goeth, and another generation cometh; and the earth abideth for ever. . . . All things are full of weariness; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing nor the ear with hearing. That which hath been is that which shall be; and that which hath been done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there a thing whereof men say, See, this is new? It hath been already in the ages which were before us."

If that is true, one cannot quarrel with Koheleth's verdict: everything *is* vanity. It is curious that this other classical expression of the attitude to life based on a contemplation of the eternal recurrence should have

been written by a Jew, seeing that the Jews were the one people in that Hellenistic world who stood for the contrary view of the time-process. It is probable indeed that the writer of Ecclesiastes was one of those Jews whose outlook had been profoundly modified by contact with Hellenism, and that his view of life was largely Greek, not Hebrew. But it may still seem strange that the implications in the Greek view of the eternal recurrence should have been expressed more forcibly by one who came to Hellenism from another sphere than by any born Greek that we know of. Yet that may not really be such a paradox. Perhaps it was just someone who had passed to Hellenism from the Hebrew sphere, from the sphere in which there was a living hope in connection with the time-process, who would feel most intensely the desolation of the Greek outlook. The Greeks may have been too accustomed to it from childhood to feel that as it was felt by a Jew who had known his ancestral faith and lost it.

Yet even those who had been accustomed from childhood to the hopeless view of the time-process, and had taken it as a matter of course, might experience a thrill of new

life if they came into contact with people who awakened in them the thought that perhaps after all the time-process was not vanity, that the world was really moving under Divine direction to some transcendent consummation. When Christianity spread in the Greco-Roman world, that is what Christians declared to their pagan neighbours. It is interesting to find a modern German writer on the philosophy of history, Heinrich Rickert, putting his finger on that, as the thing which more than any other secured the ultimate victory of Christianity. I have already in other published writing of mine drawn attention to the passage from Rickert quoted by Baron von Hügel in his *Essays and Addresses*, Second Series, p. 30:

"Precisely in this uniqueness, this incomparableness of the object reside all our feelings and standards as to the ultimate worth of anything, and of all things. And even the totality of the historic process derives its worth for us from its unrepeatableness; indeed it was this principle of Uniqueness—a unique Fall, a unique Redemption, a unique life's Trial here, and a unique Judgment hereafter—which decided

the victory in favour of the Christian philosophy, in its Patristic stage and form, as against Hellenism, with its ever-increasing insistence upon the Universal and upon indefinite Repetition, or, at least, repeatableness."

No doubt if we want to give causes for a great change in the thoughts and the attitude of men, such as the conversion of the Greco-Roman world to the profession of Christianity, they are so complex that it is a mistake to suppose that any one cause can account for it. But it seems to me that among the causes the one here indicated by Rickert probably was very important: a view of the time-process which gave it interest and meaning had a wonderful attraction for men who had never thought of it as leading anywhere. If, however, we lay stress on this cause amongst those to which the victory of Christianity was due, we must recognize that this belief about the time-process belongs to the essentially Hebraic foundation of Christianity. Before men were drawn by such an exigence to the Church, it will have been a similar attraction which had drawn proselytes from the Greco-Roman world to the Synagogue.

There, too, they would have heard that the time-process had begun in the One God's "mighty act" of Creation, that it was marked all through by His "mighty acts" of redemptive love in choosing and saving and guiding His people, and that it was being directed by Him to a consummation of transcendent glory, a realization of the ideal state of His people in righteousness and joy, a kingdom of God without end. It is important to see that however much the Christian Church may have built on that Hebraic foundation things which Judaism felt bound to repudiate, the foundation for the whole fabric of Christian belief remained the old Hebraic one — the world-process going from the unique act of Creation to the unique consummation of the kingdom of God, with mighty acts of redemptive love coming at particular moments in the process. It is quite untrue to say that the Christian Creeds showed that Christianity had shifted from its Hebraic foundation to become a Greek mystery-religion. For of what kind of statements do the Christian Creeds consist? They consist of statements that certain unique events of universal importance took place, or will take place, at particular moments of

time. It would, of course, be absurd to minimize the disagreement between the Synagogue and the Church in regard to the compatibility or incompatibility of the alleged events with true thoughts of the Divine nature; but below that disagreement there are the presuppositions common to both, that the meaning of the time-process is to be found in the significance of unique events of some kind taking place at particular moments of time, in Divine mighty acts of redemptive love of some kind, and that the whole process gets its ultimate value from the end to which it will lead up, the establishment of the eternal kingdom of God. It was those presuppositions which made Hebraic religion, whether in its Jewish or in its Christian form, contrast so strangely with the hopeless outlook of the Greco-Roman world.

And to-day? How do we stand to-day? The last century has brought about greater changes perhaps in the minds of men than any hundred years before. The advance of natural science has modified to a greater or less extent everyone's view of the universe. Jews and Christians alike find that the

picture of the world and the time-process which seemed quite satisfactory to their fathers is inadequate to the reality as it has been revealed to us now. The essentials of the faith, it may be said, remain unshaken. That I myself believe; only many things which our fathers probably thought essential no longer seem essential to most educated people to-day. The great difference which modern science has made is that it has enormously extended the space and the time which surround our earth and the few thousands of years covered by human civilization. Instead of that little span of six or seven thousand years which seemed to our fathers, Jewish and Christian, to be the whole time-process from Adam to the anticipated consummation, we see a reach of unnumbered hundreds of thousands of years stretching back to a past when man began to be distinguishable from the beasts, and stretching forward into a future through which the life of man on this troublous planet is likely to go on. Human history, Professor Jeans thinks, may well go on for another million years. To our ancestors the call of Abraham seemed something very ancient, so that the history of the Chosen

People extended through quite a respectable part of the time-process; to-day the call of Abraham, if indeed we are allowed to believe by modern critics that Abraham ever existed at all, was an event comparatively of yesterday, and the whole history of Israel and the Christian Church as it were an agitation of the last brief hour in the life of mankind. And when we look forward into the unknown immensities of the future, what has become of the old Hebraic and Zoroastrian hope of an approaching kingdom of God?

We have to adjust our faith, if we still hold it fast, to this new appearance of the time-process. And when we consider it, we see that in some ways the new scientific view of the time-process agrees rather with the old Hebrew-Zoroastrian view than with the idea of eternal recurrence prevalent in the ancient classical world and in India. For the time-process, although enormously longer than was supposed, presents itself not as circular, but as a single forward movement from the formation of the globe, the beginnings of life, and the origin of man up to the state of human society on the globe to-day. And that time-process, too, has its

stages marked by a series of unique events. When something happened to a particular breed of creatures on the planet which made them men, not beasts, that was a development unlike anything which had ever happened before and made a new difference which was permanent throughout the following hundreds of thousands of years up to the present time. Again, when men passed in Egypt and Babylonia from the primitive condition to civilized life with larger knowledge, more perfect means of communication and greater possibilities of co-operation, that represented a new stage in the history of mankind, something of which you could really say, in spite of Koheleth, "See, this is new." And so on through other unique steps right on to the condition of to-day. Mankind to-day has reached a knowledge of the natural world, a power to use natural forces for human purposes, an enlargement of the possibilities of communication all over the globe, which makes the present state of mankind unlike anything which has ever existed before. It may be disputable whether there is on the whole more happiness in the world than six thousand years ago; it may be disputable whether there is more good-

ness in the world; but it cannot be disputed that man has vastly greater knowledge and vastly greater power.

A consideration of the enormous extent of the time-process, as we now see it, is often used to discredit the permanence of any religious belief or the enduring religious significance of any person or event. How, it is asked, can you suppose that any idea you may have about the world to-day or any significance you may attach to any person or event belonging to the last few thousand years will not have faded like a fancy of childhood from the mind of man as he will be a hundred thousand years hence? Now it is pretty certain that no system of ideas held by any man or any set of men will continue to be held altogether unchanged and unmodified for a hundred thousand years to come: no doubt some of the things we believe to-day will seem to our descendants outworn fancies. But a consideration of the past does not show that we can reach no religious beliefs which will endure. For we have just seen how the time-process appears as a process in which at particular moments unique steps are taken to new things which endure. The step by which

man arose from the animal has not been retraced: each step by which man attained some new piece of knowledge represents a permanent acquisition, which may be added to, but is not cast aside. When some savages whose fathers had never been able to count beyond five first arrived at a new arithmetical conception which took them, let us suppose, to ten, the idea they then got has not become obsolete in the thousands of years which have elapsed since; it has been added to by all that constitutes the mathematical knowledge of Professor Whitehead and Professor Hardy. And we need not be afraid that the further accessions to mathematical knowledge in a million years to come will make the ideas of Professor Whitehead and Professor Hardy obsolete, though those ideas may come to bear a proportion to the mathematical knowledge of a million years hence similar to that borne by the mathematical ideas of primitive savages to Professor Whitehead's and Professor Hardy's to-day. Of course, not everything which seems a new permanent acquisition proves to be such; as scientific knowledge advances many beliefs of former scientists about nature do get discarded, but something

won in the past remains a permanent element in the growing body of knowledge handed on. If it were not so, if every idea of a past generation were ultimately cast aside by later generations, there would be no such thing as progress or advance at all; for progress means not only change but permanence; it implies something which remains identical throughout the changes, a nucleus to which additions are made, an identity at any rate of direction. Thus in the past, as we look back, the first promulgation of certain scientific ideas or scientific beliefs seems to us an event which registers the achievement of a new stage from which man does not go back. By supposing this permanent validity of certain scientific ideas and beliefs we do not tie down man from advancing to something new; a choice may, at a parting of the ways, decide for all time which the direction is along which new knowledge may fruitfully be sought. If this applies to scientific ideas, it applies equally to religious beliefs. It is quite probable that the idea of God we have to-day will seem inadequate to men a hundred thousand years hence, and yet it may appear to them that when we took the line of thinking of

God as personal rather than as impersonal, we were taking the true line of fruitful advance in religion, and that while future advances may enormously enrich men's conceptions of what is implied in personality, it will never be anything but a retrogression to think of God as impersonal. In that way faith in God as the Father in heaven may be something which will never become obsolete, however long the history of man goes on, any more than a child's early faith in God becomes obsolete because some of the imaginations which a child attaches to the idea of God are discarded by the mature man. But further, it is still possible, on these principles, to attach permanent religious significance to unique individuals in the history of mankind. Just as the unknown people who brought the dwellers by the Nile and the dwellers by the Euphrates at some time in the past to the civilized level were doing a work which would give them a unique significance from the cultural point of view, however long a history of men was still to come, just as Homer will always hold his position as the beginning of European literature, so a prophet who leads men to some new conception of God which is an

abiding inheritance of men in time to come may have a unique religious significance in the time-process. That is not tying men down to the figures of the past, for the significance of the figure in the past may be precisely that he was the initiator in the world of a new life which goes on developing.

So looked at, the time-process, as we see it in the light of modern science, has points of resemblance to the time-process as it appeared to the ancient Hebrews and Persians—a process moving from a unique beginning, continuous in a particular direction, marked at particular moments by unique events and unique persons of abiding significance. It is true that some modern scientists have adopted the idea of eternal recurrence: I believe this was done by the Swede Arrhenius; Herbert Spencer also inclined to it; Nietzsche, though he can hardly count as a scientist, made it a part of his philosophy. According to this view, our time-process from the formation of some nebula millions of years ago, although it has been a forward movement up to the present day, and may go on being a forward movement for some thousands or millions

of years to come, will end at last in the extinction of all life. The matter of our world will reach a state which can be only that of a dead world. Then, it is supposed, something may again start going in the universe a process similar to that in which we are living, which will again, after a certain number of millions of years, end in death, and so on for ever. This, of course, is very like the Stoic theory, without the Stoic belief in a determining Providence. But I do not think that most scientists to-day would subscribe to this belief in an eternal recurrence; they would, I think, most of them, say that our knowledge was too limited to allow us to form any forecast of a future beyond that of the existing time-process, and a great many of them, I think, would not even like to make any forecast, except as an indulgence in romantic speculation, regarding the ultimate destiny of the human race. For them, then, the time-process, so far as we can look back upon it up to to-day, is a continuous forward movement with unique moments, as the time-process is for Jews and Christians; but whereas, looking into the future, Jews and Christians see the process moving to a final

kingdom of God, modern science, as such, sees in front of it only a great darkness.

If to-day Jews and Christians still adhere to the old faith that the time-process is being guided by God to some glorious end which will give its value and meaning to the whole, that is plainly not a conclusion of scientific research, but an act of religious faith, like the belief in the reality of God Himself. Belief in God implies that the time-process has a meaning for the Spirit. But here one has to consider a view sometimes put forward. To believe in God, it is said, is a right act of faith, but such a belief ought to be quite independent of any view of the time-process; God is not in time, but in an eternal Now, and the soul which comes into communion with God enters a sphere where time no longer counts. Such communion does not draw its value from any supposed future, but realizes in the present everything needed to satisfy the spirit of man to the full. The mystical forms of religion tend especially to such a view, and the mystical forms of religion have greater affinity with Plato, with the Greek for whom, as we have seen, the time-process was an illusion and a vanity, than with the old Hebrew and the

Christian attitude to the world. The view in question has found an able exponent in our own time, the present Dean of St. Paul's. He describes himself as a Platonist, and he shows a strong antipathy to the type of religion which rests on any hope regarding the future. He recognizes indeed that to that type early Christianity belonged, that it took over such a hope from Hebrew religion. But he does not like it any the better for that; the Christianity which he sees in ideal is a form of Platonism; the Hebrew elements in Christianity, when they protrude, excite his displeasure. The view that the time-process is leading up to a kingdom of God in the future he has described as "a Jewish dream" which is apt to get "coarsened into promises of 'a good time coming' ".*

I am afraid you cannot get rid of the Hebrew elements in Christianity; whether you like them or whether you spurn at them, there they are, its essential core. Yet the challenge put to this belief in the meaning of the time-process, from the point of view of those who take the mystical or the Greek view, is one which should make us think what the Jewish and Christian

* *Outspoken Essays*, Second Series, p. 178.

hope really does, and does not, imply. For one cannot regard Dean Inge's dislike of eschatological expectation as wholly without cause. We should all of us to-day, looking back on the particular imagery with which the eschatological hope clothed itself for the writers of Jewish apocalypses and for early Christians and for many of the Rabbis in later centuries, regard a very great deal of it as imagination belonging to phases of human culture now left behind. That part of it, if taken literally to-day, would seem to us unworthily material. But when we begin to strip off this vesture of childish imagination, where are we to stop? When do we get to what we can still hold to to-day as the essential reality? When, for instance, we read in the old Jewish book, the Apocalypse of Baruch, and in a closely parallel fragment of the early Christian writer Papias, that in the Messianic age "the earth shall yield its fruit ten thousand fold and on each vine there shall be a thousand branches, and each branch shall produce a thousand clusters, and each cluster shall produce a thousand grapes, and each grape produce a *cor* of wine",*

* Baruch xxix. 5.

we do not hesitate to treat that as mythological fancy. The view that a state of the globe is coming when its vegetable fertility will be miraculously increased would not, I think, for many educated Jews or Christians to-day give its essential content to any picture of a kingdom of God upon earth which they may frame. But must we go so far as to reject as childish imagery the idea that any kingdom of God can come upon this earth at all? For it would seem as if a faith that the time-process was determined by God to lead up to a great consummation which will give it its significance and value may still stand, even if the future consummation is not any state of this material globe, but an existence of the Divine Community in God's presence under conditions quite different from those of earthly space and time—in heaven, as we say.

The Rabbinical books, as is well known, commonly distinguish between a temporary Messianic age, during which the physical conditions on earth will remain on the whole as they are to-day, and the eternal state, the "World-to-come", which begins, when the Messianic age is over, with the Resurrection; and a similar conception is found in the

Christian book, the Revelation of St. John. There, too, the reign of the Messiah on earth lasts for only a thousand years; after that the Resurrection takes place, our heaven and earth pass away, and God creates a new heaven and a new earth for the eternal state. Many people to-day would be disposed to get rid of this reduplication, regarding the temporary Messianic age on earth as simply a bit of the old childish imagery kept on. In the Christian view, as it became ultimately consolidated in the Catholic Church, the belief in an earthly millennium faded; it was supposed that the present condition of the earth would continue right up to the Resurrection and be immediately succeeded by the eternal state. But there came to be also a difference of conception regarding the eternal state between the Christian Church and Rabbinical Judaism. For Christians, the eternal state would now not be on any kind of earth, but in heaven, whereas for the Rabbis, the *locus* of the eternal state was this earth, miraculously renovated indeed, but still this earth.*

* I make that statement on the authority of Strack and Billerbeck, vol. iv, p. 969; if it is not true, I hope to be corrected, since I have no first-hand knowledge of Rabbinical literature.

Modern men generally, I think, find it impossible to regard any state under the conditions of earthly space and time as a consummation which could finally and completely satisfy the spiritual exigence of man; in so far modern men no doubt can only think of the final state of human spirits as realized in "heaven"—that is, in some mode of being to which the limitations of earthly space and time do not apply. Yet it may be right to recognize that, in making the *locus* of the final state this earth, the Rabbis were taking the only reasonable view, if you adhere to the belief in a literal resurrection of the body.

In speaking of the belief in a literal resurrection of the body, the shape and distribution of limbs and organs remaining as they are in normal human bodies now, we are speaking of a belief to which large numbers of Christians certainly, and, I think, large numbers of Jews, are still attached. It is a dogma to which the great Roman Catholic Church is committed: you may read the very curious discussion of some of the problems it raises in the Catechism of the Council of Trent; how much at the Resurrection a man would have of the hair

which had been his in life, what would happen in the case of people who, by a deformity here, had an excessive number of fingers or toes, and so on. A belief which is still held by a large number of people for whose goodness I feel a deep reverence and who are, many of them, quite as qualified as myself to estimate the philosophic implications of any theory, is one which I should be sorry to speak of with anything but respect. Yet it remains true that for many other people to-day—probably for most educated Christians outside the Roman communion and most educated Jews—the idea of a literal resurrection of the body has become impossible. This is not a difference which divides Christians from Jews; it is a difference which divides modern Christians and modern Jews from their respective fathers. In believing in a literal bodily resurrection the Church and the Synagogue of former ages stood together. The great difficulty is not an objection to the miraculous as such: we may quite admit the validity of the argument that if God could create the body, He can re-create it. The difficulty arises from the incompatibility of the idea of a material body with the final

state of the blessed in a heaven not subject to conditions of material space and time. God can restore the body of a man long become dust to the shape it had during life: certainly, but is it a reasonable action to attribute to God that He should maintain for all eternity under non-material conditions a bodily constitution which in its every detail is made for adaptation to earthly needs, that men, for instance, should go on for all eternity having legs and feet when there had ceased to be earthly ground for them to walk on? Medieval Christians had definitely accepted the idea that the final state of the redeemed community would be, not in a material world, but in heaven; for them, therefore, the doctrine of a literal resurrection was a dreadful difficulty; you may look at the arguments by which St. Thomas Aquinas tries to show that it is not unreasonable that men should go on for eternity possessing limbs and organs after all use for them had passed away. The Synagogue was free from this difficulty, because the Rabbis taught, quite logically, that the eternity of a material body implied the eternity of a material habitation. Modern men get rid of the difficulty not by the way

of arguing from the material body to the material habitation, but in arguing from the fact that the habitation must be non-material to the non-materiality of whatever in the final state can be described as "body".

How modern Christians and Jews interpret the doctrine of the resurrection of the body is, I think, something like this. The human being, they say, who enters after death into a higher state in the Divine Presence, is not to be thought of simply as a disembodied soul. The difference between that mode of existence and this is not a negative one only—the loss of a body: human spirits in that state must be endowed with means of effecting their purposes and communicating with each other far more perfect than these present bodies of ours. In that way we may speak of them as having spiritual bodies, though we can form no imagination of what a spiritual body is like. Their life and personality and energy beyond death should be thought of, not as impoverished, but as enormously enriched.

That, I think, is how very many modern Jews and Christians would interpret the traditional belief in a bodily resurrection. Many would probably say that such a way

of regarding it gets rid of the difficult reduplication involved in the old eschatological scheme—a passage of the individual into the Divine Presence and an individual judgment at death, and, again, a general Resurrection and a general Judgment at the end of the time-process. The resurrection takes place only individually, they say, as each soul after death attains the joy of the Divine Presence. Many people feel that the idea of a cosmic event at the end of human history, like a general resurrection, has become superfluous and has ceased to have any *raison d'être.*

Here I would like to suggest that even if we feel bound to discard the belief that at the end of the time-process the bodies of all the men who have lived on earth will be restored to material existence, it may still be that the belief in a general Resurrection did point to a future cosmic event, and that the exigence it expressed is not completely satisfied by the present-day belief in an individual resurrection taking place only in the spiritual world after death. You have, I think, to take into account that the bliss of the final state cannot, on the essential presuppositions of Judaism and Christianity,

be thought of as merely individual, a dwelling of each soul with God, *solus cum solo*—it must be a communal bliss, an existence of the Divine Community of spirits in perfection and mutual love and joy. But if the essence of the final state is the perfection of the Divine Community, according to the design of the Creator, then there must always be some imperfection in the realization till the Community is complete. If every human individual is unique, and so makes a unique contribution to the immense harmony of innumerable distinct notes, which corresponds to the design of Him who has conceived it as a whole of infinite wonder and glory, then, so long as there are still individual spirits to come, their unique contributions will be lacking to the whole. But so soon as the whole is complete, that very completeness may give the whole a meaning and beauty which the community could not have before; then, and not till then, when all its members are there, will the thought of the Creator be revealed, just as in a sentence the addition of the last word may give the previous words of the sentence a significance which they could not have till the whole sentence was com-

plete. But further, since we must believe that the bliss of each member in the Divine Community involves that member's rejoicing in the bliss and beauty of the Community as a whole, the completion of the Community would necessarily be an event for each member individually, a possibility for each member of joy he could not have had till then. In that way the old view which distinguished between the present relatively imperfect happiness of the disembodied spirit and the perfect happiness which would be realized at the last day, when soul and body were reunited, may correspond with a real distinction between the relatively imperfect beatitude attained individually by spirits after death, whilst the Divine Community is still incomplete, and the perfect beatitude attained by all together when, at the end of time, the Community is complete.

When Dean Inge tells us that it is not essential to religion to believe that there is a good time coming, that may mean either of two things—it may mean that it is not essential to believe that this earth will ever reach a condition when the people living on it will in the mass be righteous and happy, that no kingdom of God can be realized

within the time-process, even in its final phase, or it may mean that it is not essential to believe in a state of happiness *beyond* the time-process, to which the time-process leads and without which the time-process would be meaningless. I do not doubt that Dean Inge really means the former, and it may be true that our faith would still stand, if we were sure that the last phase of human life on this planet would not be above the present level in goodness and happiness. It *is* true, I believe, that no realization of the kingdom of God under conditions of earthly space and time could be satisfying, and that any religion which made its chief concern an improvement of conditions on this planet would not meet the highest spiritual exigence of man. Yet the hope that even on this planet man may be brought to a higher level of goodness and happiness does not seem to me absurd. If it comes about, then we *shall* have something like what the Rabbis pictured—a temporary, glorious but imperfect, Messianic age, to be succeeded by the eternal state. If we must not build our faith on such a hope, to say that it is unspiritual to entertain it, even as a hope, seems to me quite unjustifiable.

After all, the time-process exists as part of the universe willed by God, and it has got to have an end of some kind. Why should it not be an end in which good becomes actual, so far as it can become actual in earthly space and time?

But if Dean Inge could be taken to mean —which I do not for a minute suppose— that it is not essential to believe in any future beatitude at all, even a heavenly one, that would seem to me a rejection of the essential faith on which Judaism and Christianity stand. Deep in the heart of both is a sense of the unsatisfactoriness of the present, even when men rise as high as they can rise here in communion with God. In an impressive book, Professor Sorley's Gifford Lectures on *Moral Values and the Idea of God*, it is urged, with what seems to me convincing force, that the only view of the time-process compatible with Theism is that which sees it as the embodiment of a Divine Purpose. The present is unsatisfactory because the process is incomplete. The end and object of the process is the formation in such a world as this of human characters, of human souls, by their own acts of will in response to God. A purpose implies essentially

a process which gets its value and meaning from the end, and if this world is intended by God to be the "valley of soul-making", there must be a state of things when souls are made. Any view of the time-process which construes it as Purpose must therefore be essentially eschatological; it must rest on the belief in some consummation still future, to which the process is leading. There are some words of Paul, to which Jews as well as Christians may assent, those in which he speaks of the whole creation as groaning and travailing in pain together until now, and describes the divine event for which the creation is earnestly waiting as "the manifestation of the sons of God".

APPENDIX

NOTE TO PAGE 55

IT is interesting to observe that Origen, who in some respects felt about things more as a modern Christian than any other ancient Christian doctor, while he accepted the Church tradition that there would be a

bodily resurrection, found the idea of men being eternally incarnate in bodies of the same form as our present ones inacceptable. He held that the resurrection body would be spherical (*λέγει γὰρ ὅτι ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει σφαιροειδῆ ἐγείρονται τὰ σώματα τῶν ἀνθρώπων*, Mansi, ix. 516D). Such a conception would not then have seemed as odd as it does now. The sphere, as we find in Plato, was the perfect shape. The Stoics taught that the universe as a whole was an animated sphere, which was God ("isti rotundo deo", Cicero, *De Nat. Deor.*, i. § 24), and that souls, when they left the body, became spherical (Von Arnim, *Stoic. Vet. Frag.*, ii. frag. 815). In the Hermetic writing, *Asclepius* (iii. 23*b*), the heavenly bodies are pointed to as gods who are spherical in shape. I do not know whether some form of this tradition suggested to Dante the idea in his *Paradiso*, where the souls of the blessed, in their discarnate state, awaiting the Resurrection, appear to him in the form of shining globes.

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